



## **GIGANTIC DOSSIER**

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It is difficult to sort out fact from fiction, in light of all the rumour and myth surrounding *Britannic's* name and its origins. This dossier is intended to bring together a number of sources, including several newly discovered items, which shed some light on the debate. It showcases the comprehensive article 'The *Gigantic* Question,' which was published in the *Titanic* Historical Society's [Titanic Commutator](#).

Was the name *Gigantic* ever considered for the ship? Indeed, was the name changed as a result of the *Titanic* disaster? For years, debate focused on newspaper reports, with the occasional source such as the recollections of C. C. Pounder - a former Harland & Wolff employee. However, two new sources surfaced: a hitherto unknown document from a subcontractor, naming the ship as *Gigantic* in February 1912; and an extract from the Harland & Wolff order book, conversely giving the name *Britannic* late in 1911! These sources, among many others - including previously unnoticed newspaper reports - are all included in the article and their significance assessed.

## Mark Chirnside's Reception Room

Right: Hull No. 433 rises on the stocks at Harland & Wolff shipyard. (J. Kent Layton Collection.)



### **'THE GIGANTIC QUESTION' by Mark Chirnside and Paul Lee.**

This article was published in the *Titanic* Historical Society's *Titanic Commutator* 2008 : Volume 31 Number 180: Pages 181-92. The material presented here is a mere summary, presented with some additional snippets of information.

The article presents:

- The most [comprehensive examination](#) of source material relating to Yard Number 433's name - from newspaper reports, to recently unearthed documentation such as the Hingley's chain and anchor order book, and the Harland & Wolff order book.
- Documentation that the name *Gigantic* was used by Hingley's, when the ship's anchor outfit was ordered, in February 1912. This material was also utilised subsequently by researcher [Jonathan Smith](#).
- Another recently discovered item in the form of the Harland & Wolff order book, which Simon Mills made use of in his earlier *Commutator* article (*Titanic Commutator* 2007: Volume 31 Number 178: Pages 74-76.).

The origins of the article go back to 2003, when Mark began to compile references from newspaper reports and other sources relating to the name of the third sister. In 2007, Paul Lee - who had been doing sterling research in the same area - became a co-author and the paper was finished for publication. Among other new discoveries, such as previously overlooked newspaper articles, were the Hingley documentation and the record in the Harland & Wolff order book. (After all these years, it was quite a coincidence that all these sources were uncovered at around the same time. Mark and Paul found the Hingley material shortly before Jonathan did; and, in turn, Simon ran across the Harland & Wolff order book shortly before Mark did.)

### Did you know?

The name *Gigantic* just kept cropping up in newspaper reports. It was noted at least three times, over an eighteen year period from 1892 to 1910, with reference to other White Star Line ships. In 1911-12, it was associated with the third 'Olympic' class liner.

In the 1960s, researcher John Eaton discovered an 1892 reference in the *New York Times*:

London, Sept. 16 - The White Star Company has commissioned the great Belfast shipbuilders Harland & Wolff to build an Atlantic steamer that will beat the record in size and speed.

She has already been named *Gigantic*, and will be 700 feet long, 65 feet 7½ inches beam and 4,500 horsepower. It is calculated that she will steam 22 knots an hour, with a maximum speed of 27 knots. She will have three screws, two fitted like *Majestic's*, and a third in the centre. She is to be ready for sea in March, 1894.

Although the length was similar to the *Oceanic*, this design concept was not pursued. If the engines of such a large ship only produced 4,500 horsepower, then it is hard to see how she could have made 22, let alone 27, knots. Certainly no such vessel appeared in 1894. (See Eaton, John P., and Haas, Charles A., *Titanic: Destination Disaster*. Patrick Stephens Limited; 1987. Page 55.)

When *Oceanic* appeared in 1899, one news report stated: 'when the White Star company first decided upon its new vessel the name *Gigantic* was considered, but it was finally determined to name her after their pioneer steam vessel, *Oceanic*.'

As outlined in '[The Gigantic Question](#),' one newspaper report in 1910 claimed that *Olympic* might have been called *Gigantic*, had her sister not been named *Titanic*. (Had the third sister been so named, then *Titanic* followed by *Gigantic* would hardly have sounded more modest.)

Newspaper reports can be - and are often - notoriously unreliable. None of the references can be taken as anything definitive, but these articles are - nevertheless - interesting.

### ***Britannic's Breadth: Correction***

*Titanic Commutator* 2008: Volume 31 Number 180: Page 209.

Dear THS,

I wanted to offer my thanks for another fine issue of the *Commutator*. On a personal note, you presented my own article very well and I am grateful for your professionalism.

Particularly interesting to me was Simon Mills' fine article regarding *Britannic* and the name change debate. He is to be congratulated for making use of this source [the Harland & Wolff order book], which unfortunately has been overlooked for so long. His work demonstrates the importance of primary source material.

I did have one or two clarifications, however. The article refers to the eighteen inch increase in *Britannic's* moulded breadth, from 92 feet to 93 feet 6 inches, and then the increase in the length of all twenty-four double-ended boilers from twenty to twenty one feet. It then goes on to say: 'Exactly when these additions were made and, more importantly why, is unclear at this time...'

However, in terms of the boilers, it is quite clear from the document itself that the original size of 20' 0" has been crossed out, and then in red ink it has been replaced by 21'. There is a red pointer here which quite clearly dates this modification to January 3rd 1912, so this modification is dated very specifically, and although the copy in the article is in black and white it is visible in small print.

With regard to the change in the breadth, it's absolutely right in that there's no date given next to the amendment in this document. However, the increased breadth was confirmed as 93 feet 6 inches in a document presented to Lord Pirrie and dated October 17th 1911. Certainly, the moulded breadth was originally written as 92 feet and then amended to 93 feet 6 inches, so there seems no reason to doubt the date that has been documented.

Once again, the *Commutator* has shown itself as being at the forefront of original research.

Mark Chirnside, via e-mail, England.

**NB.** The information regarding *Britannic's* breadth is important. In terms of interpreting the Harland & Wolff order book information, we know that the original breadth was written down in it and then amended. Given that the breadth was altered - increased - in October 1911 then this means that the ship's technical specifications were written in prior to the keel being laid. We know that the name given in this document, *Britannic*, was the only one written in for yard number 433. There is no evidence that it was ever altered. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to prove that it was written at the same time as the technical specifications, but there is no evidence to the contrary. It is the most important source for the name *Britannic*, dating it to prior to the keel being laid.