



# Timeless Tribute to Titanic Artisans

**RMS Titanic was designed to be the ultimate 1912 experience of luxury travel** and was one of the most majestic ships of her time. Constructed by Harland and Wolff, she was built to impress her passengers, regardless of which class they travelled, their every need catered for by her Officers and Crew. *Titanic's* facilities were of the ultimate quality in every detail that could be offered to all on-board and they celebrated their fine work, never suspecting that she would collide with an iceberg and sink on her maiden voyage taking about 1517 souls with her to where she now rests. Had she survived until today, she would be one of the greatest floating showcases of early 1900 artisan skills ever created.

100 years later, she still holds the fascination of people around the world. **Timeless Antiques** would like to pay tribute to those who created and built her, to those who sailed on her and especially to those who lost their lives and are buried with her. One century later, she still is the ship of dreams to many people who have dedicated part of their lives trying to unravel the many secrets she took with her to the ocean floor on the night of April 15, 1912. The Titanic remained a ship of intrigue with her exact location unknown for 73 years, until 1985 when Jean-Louis Michel and Dr Robert Ballard located the wreck using a remote operated vehicle at a depth of 2.4 miles and approx. 13 nautical miles from the last recorded position relayed by the Titanic's Fourth Officer – Joseph Boxhall together with the new distress Morse code signal - SOS.



Wreck images, at last came to the surface and were viewed across the world. Of particular interest to **Timeless Antiques**, amongst the Titanic debris on the ocean floor and scattered through her rusting hull are dozens on brass bedsteads, they found many standing upright in their original state-rooms, the timber walls and timber furniture destroyed by the sea. How proud the original brass bedstead artisan would be, to know that after all that happened on the night of the sinking and despite decades of darkness, their fine workmanship remains. During our restorations at Timeless Antiques we often marvel at the skill of the original bed artisans, the strength and endurance of time of their raw material and their completed bedstead design. When working with and restoring these old cast iron and brass bedsteads, we firmly believe we are helping preserve their future for future generations to enjoy. In our business today we use original bedstead and mail order catalogues, to assist with our restorations to ensure their restoration is reflective of their original design.

**Bedstead Recollection** - When James Cameron, director of the 1997 film version of Titanic, personally witnessed the wreck, clearly the Titanic brass beds left an impression on him, and in turn his recollection has impacted on us and we would like to thank him for taking the time to write about something others may have left unsaid and this would still be unknown to us now. *"Moving forward into first-class staterooms on the port side, the wooden walls between the rooms, as above on the Boat Deck, have virtually deteriorated to nothing. However, many, if not all, brass beds are still standing in place, upright. The beds in the region of room A-30 are of a pattern seen in 1911 Shipbuilder (p. 95). The same design was found opposite on the starboard side. The small finial "urns" at the top of the bedposts are still brightly gilt as are the head and footboard bas-reliefs, which depict sacrificial ox skulls decorated with garlands. A plated gimbal lamp lies across the top of one headboard, fallen from where it had been hung the night of the sinking when the wood wall behind it crumbled away. To the left of the lamp is an electrical outlet and switches, just as in the Shipbuilder photo, the lamp still plugged in. I was particularly struck by the number of brass beds we saw on the starboard side. The stateroom walls might be gone, but it was easy to tell we were entering another room when we passed two beds end to end. Brass bed after brass bed could be seen off into the darkness, their gilded details reflecting back the lights of our ROV. They almost invariably looked in perfect condition. The only damage I ever saw was a missing finial and one or two footboards canted one way or another, not perfectly vertical. On the starboard side, some cloth lies draped over one of the brass footboards. No colour is apparent; the fabric just looks black. I recall seeing a similar cloth fragment in another stateroom, perhaps on D Deck. It seems that, once again, contact with the metal has protected it."* Source: <http://marconigraph.com/titanic/cameron/cameron3.html>

**The Curator of the "1912: A Titanic Odyssey – A Centenary Exhibition at the Avery Historical Museum, Soho Foundry" has spent the last 30 years, researching the Midlands connection to the Titanic. Sifting through libraries, archives, catalogues and paperwork, his research revealed that approximately 70 per cent of the ship interior was made in the Midlands including all the brass beds, which were manufactured by the Hoskins and Sewell of Bordesley.**

At the turn of the century, Birmingham was one of major industrial hubs of Britain and there were many bedstead manufacturer's based there, including Hoskins and Sewell, whose beds are documented to the Titanic. A publication of the time, called "The Shipbuilder in 1911", recalls that Hoskins and Sewell were known for their "Varnoid" process, which resulted in giving the brass work a lustre and finished that was unequalled by any other lacquer of the period, they also guaranteed this process to withstand the forces of sea air and sea water. During our restorations, we also use a modern day lacquer to retain the polish and finish of our workmanship and we must agree we are impressed with the durability of the Varnoid process, whatever it might have been. As hard as we have tried we have found locating original records is an extremely difficult task, many records destroyed as companies closed and yet many others were destroyed during the bombing of World Two, no doubt there are records safely tucked away in the vaults of archives, libraries and private collections and we hope someday to discover these and learn more about our brass bedstead artisan forebears.

Without a doubt, the RMS Titanic reflected the skill of thousands of tradesmen, craftsmen (and women). Now, there are no living survivors, her story has been retold in books and movies and since her discovery many artefacts' have been recovered including brass bed ends and now are cared for in the numerous Titanic Museums around the world. During our many years of association and restoration of Antique Brass Beds, we have often said to clients, one of the greatest attributes of a brass bed is that it is stable and solid, and ultimately will stand the test of time for other generations to enjoy. Though on reading James Cameron's recollection and on viewing Titanic wreck photographs did we then have substantial proof of our statement. *Can you imagine personally witnessing the Brass Bedsteads reflecting eerily back out of the interior darkness, standing fully upright in almost perfect condition, sharing their beauty again, despite their dark, wet and salty tomb?* We certainly now have documented proof of our often used statement – Brass Bedsteads can stand the test of time for future generations. Timeless Antiques salutes the Titanic master bedstead craftsmen.

It is also extremely important to us to acknowledge our references which have enabled us to put together our tribute to the RMS Titanic brass bedsteads and the master tradesmen and artisans who created her, may they all **Rest In Peace**.



**Titanic Bedstead Design** – James Cameron noted... *"This is the pattern of brass bedstead we found in all A-deck staterooms explored. The brass appears a dull tone today, not shiny, but looks to be completely free of corrosion. The finials and decorative elements on the headboards and footboards are gilded and are as bright as ever"*