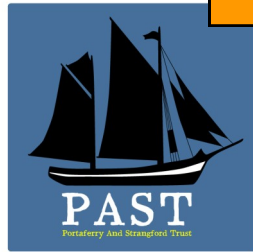


FREE

A wee bit of maritime history... 31



Thomas Andrews *Designer of the RMS Titanic*

In the early 17th century the Andrews family arrived in Ulster from Scotland and initially settled on Mahee island, the largest island in Strangford Lough. The Andrews, an entrepreneurial family, transformed Comber into an industrial town. They accumulated their wealth from the milling industry, milling corn and establishing a massive flour mill in 1771. John Andrews (1721-1808) established linen production in the town.

Thomas Andrews was born on the 7th of February 1873 into this well-known and important Ulster family. His father, Thomas Andrews (senior) had married Eliza Pirrie in 1870. Thomas, or Tommy as he was known by his family, left school at the age of sixteen in 1889 and entered the shipyard of Harland and Wolff as a premium apprentice. His uncle, Lord Pirrie was the owner of the shipyard. During his apprenticeship he spent different periods of time in each department learning the craft of shipbuilding. In the evening he attended college to learn such subjects as mechanical drawing and applied mathematics. It was said that he knew and greeted all the workmen as though they were friends.



In 1901, at the age of twenty eight, Thomas Andrews was made manager of the construction works and in 1907, on his own merit, he was made Managing Director of Harland and Wolff. He was one of the chief designers of the *RMS Titanic* and was closely involved in the construction of the famous ship and other vessels. His revolutionary designs helped to make Harland and Wolff the largest shipbuilders in the world. The *Titanic* was the largest ship in the world when it was launched on 31 May 1911.

The Andrews' family had, and still do have, a cottage on Braddock Island. With his love of the sea we know that Thomas would often have sailed from Braddock down to Portaferry and beyond. His mother told of his walking holidays that also took him to the village of Portaferry where he had a friendly word for all he met.

Thomas was very well liked by everyone he worked with and was held in the highest regard by all who knew him. He married Helen Reilly Barbour in 1908 and they settled in Belfast. In 1910 they had a daughter Elizabeth Law Barbour Andrews.



The wedding of Helen Reilly Barbour and Thomas Andrews.

As part of the nine man Guarantee Group, Thomas Andrews set off on the maiden voyage of the *Titanic* in April 1912. When the ill-fated liner struck an iceberg Thomas realised immediately that the *Titanic* was going to sink. He estimated that the crew and passengers had about two hours to be saved. In that terrible situation he did everything he could to help others into lifeboats and to provide lifebelts for crew and passengers. His actions were heroic as he was more concerned with the safety of others than of himself. Thomas Andrews, like all members of the Guarantee Group, lost his life in the tragedy, along with 1,516 other passengers. It was a devastating loss to the Andrews family and to the town of Comber.

The Andrews Memorial Hall was built in his memory and was paid for by the people of Comber. In the graveyard of the Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church in Comber, Thomas Andrews (jnr) is commemorated on the Andrews family tombstone.



The Andrews' family grave.

Stained glass window in memory of Thomas Andrews' mother in the Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church in Comber.



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