

# Reaction to the sinking of the Titanic

The sinking of the Titanic caused an international sensation. The disaster left relatives with an agonising wait for news of their loved ones, as the facts and the names of those drowned trickled through. As eyewitness accounts of the tragedy became available, there were stories of attempts to prevent steerage passengers from coming on deck; of crew members beating back desperate people attempting to board the small number of lifeboats; and of those left on board being engulfed as the Titanic went down.

Katie Gilnagh and Katie Mullen had bought their tickets from John Doherty of Esker, Killoe, who was an agent for White Star Line. John had a shop and he was a member of the first Longford Rural District Council, elected in 1899, and was later a member of Longford County Council. He became a White Star agent in 1906.

Late one afternoon, almost two weeks after the Titanic went down, Catherine Doherty, John's wife, was in the front yard at home when the postmaster from Ballinalee post office, John Joe Kiernan, arrived on his bicycle with a telegram for John. The following conversation was often retold by John's son, also John - aged seven at the time:

Catherine - 'You have news?'

Postmaster - 'I have, I have good news!'

He had a telegram to say that both Katie Gilnagh and Katie Mullen had survived the disaster. All notification regarding passengers was sent to the booking agent, hence the reason the telegram came to Doherty's of Esker with this news. Immediately Katie Doherty their eldest daughter was sent to Rhyne with the joyful news that both girls were alive and well. She recalled finding the parents sitting by the fire crying when she went into the house. Family tradition has it that John Doherty did not sell another ticket for the White Star Line and gave up the agency shortly afterwards.

## JOHN DORIS

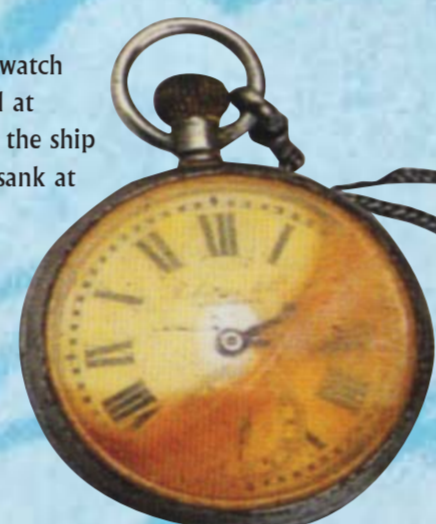
'My earliest memories go back to the year 1912. I remember reading the New York Evening Journal, the headline was 'Titanic hits iceberg and sinks!' John Jacob Astor was on board, John would have been the richest man in the world at the time'.

Courtesy of Jude Flynn, from his first edition of Fireside Tales (2003)



Emergency Bell

Pocket watch stopped at 2.16am; the ship finally sank at 2.20am



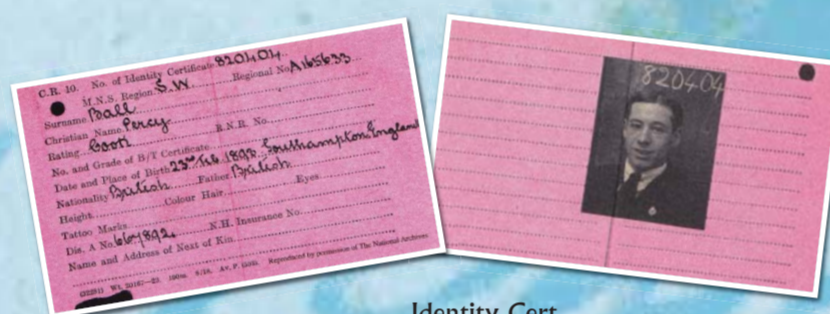
White Star Line playing cards



Rusty penknives



Propelling pencil



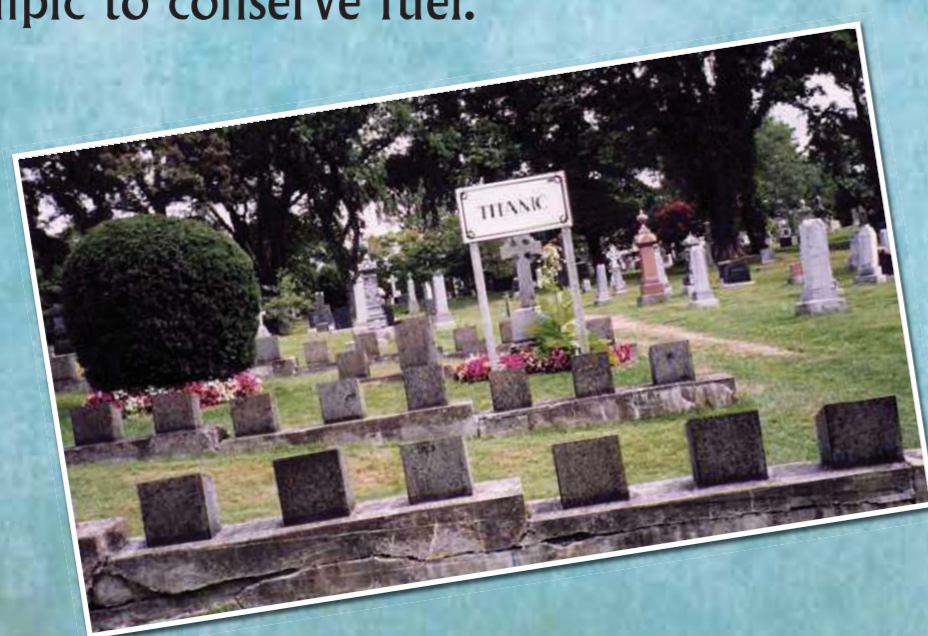
Identity Card



Crow's Nest Key

## Did you know?

- The full title of the ship was the RMS Titanic, indicating that she was a mail ship for the Royal Mail Service. There were almost 3400 bags of post and over 700 parcels on board. These remain property of the Royal Mail Service.
- One of the four funnels was a dummy, added to look more impressive and worked as a ventilation shaft.
- There were a number of animals on board Titanic including 9 dogs, of which two survived, as well as two roosters and two hens!
- There was one car on board, a Renault 35 belonging to W.E. Carter, who also had his two dogs. The Carter family survived; the car and dogs did not.
- "The Atlantic Daily Bulletin" was a newspaper produced on board the Titanic.
- The disaster was foreshadowed in 1898 by the publication of Morgan Robertson's "Futility or The Wreck of the Titan," about an Atlantic steamer on its maiden voyage. The Titan hit an iceberg resulting in a catastrophic loss of life, exacerbated by a lack of lifeboats.
- The earliest film based on the disaster starred Dorothy Gibson, a 22 year old Titanic survivor. She co-wrote and starred in "Saved from the Titanic," produced by Éclair Film Company, within a month of the disaster. Gibson even wore the same clothes that she was rescued in!
- Many of the passengers were booked on board other ships. However, due to a coal strike the White Star Line transferred passengers from cancelled trips on other ships to the Titanic and Olympic to conserve fuel.



- Of the 328 bodies recovered from the sea, 118 were unidentified. The majority of the people who perished were buried in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

## THE TITANIC REMEMBERED

Naturally, the Titanic was long remembered in stories, and ballads were written about the ship and its terrible fate. One ballad, from Killoe, has survived.

Kind friends from Longford and around  
I beg of you draw near,  
To hear of a disaster  
That has filled this world with fear.  
The largest ship, the Titanic,  
Yet built by man's hands,  
Now fathoms' deep today it lies,  
Near the shores of Newfoundland.

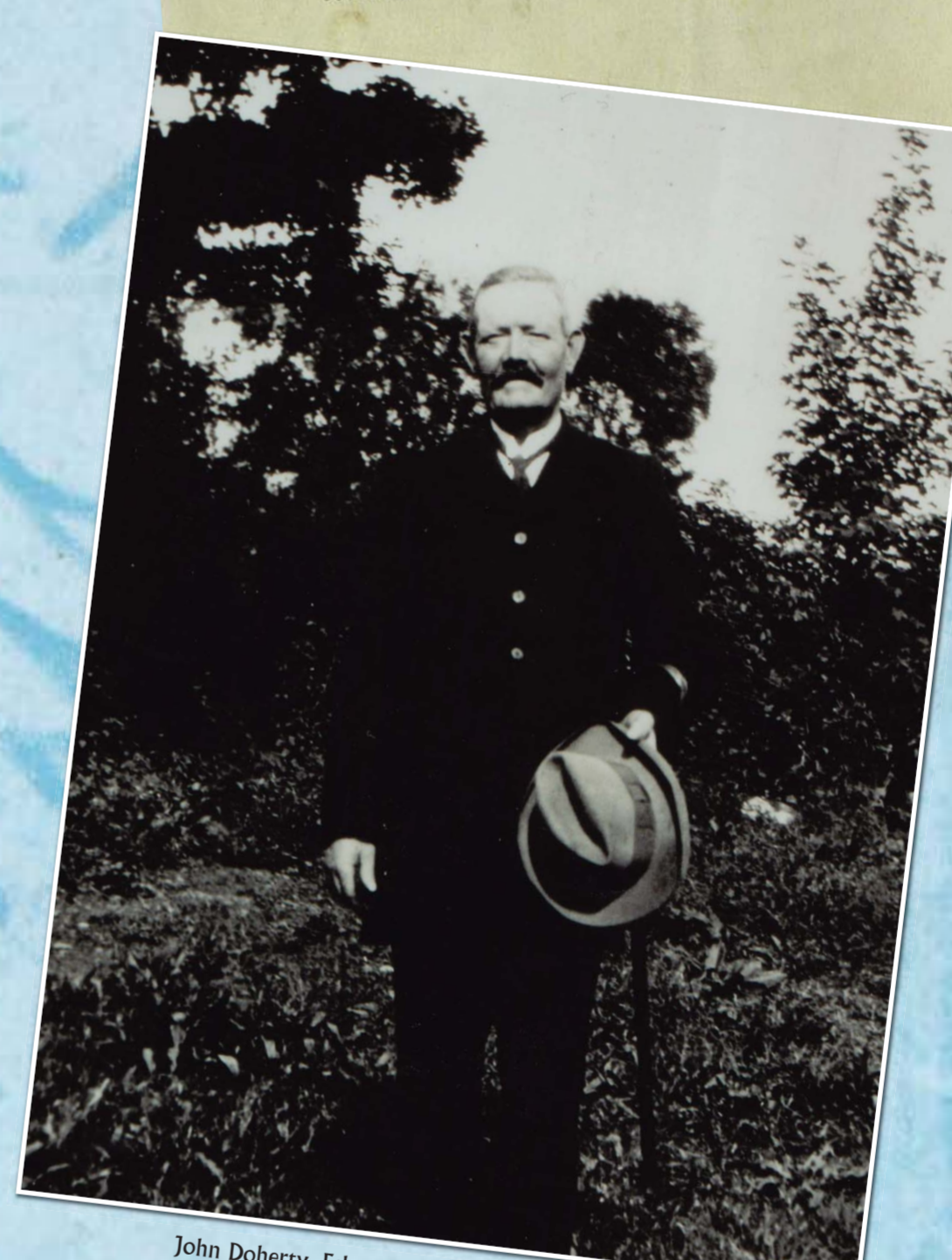
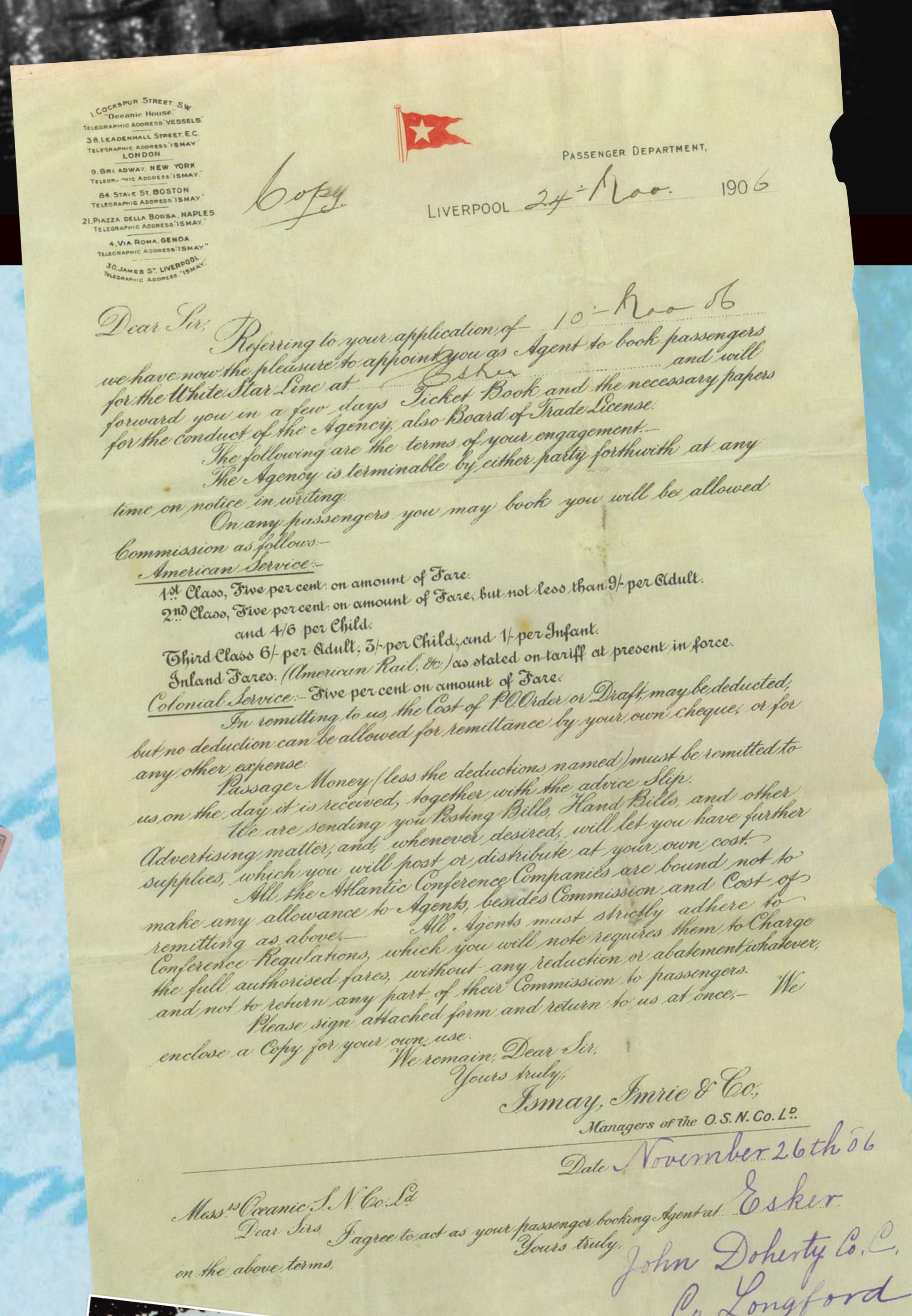
This noble ship from Queenstown sailed  
As proudly as could be,  
With near three thousand souls on board,  
It was a sight to see.  
But never more will they be seen  
Upon the emerald sod,  
Until the sea gives up its dead  
To go before their God.

Likewise from Aghnaccliffe there sailed  
A gallant little band,  
To seek their fortune and a home  
All in a foreign land.  
And many a Longford lad and lass,  
Shed tears of bitter woe,  
While parting with their dearest friends  
From Esker and Killoe.

It happened on a Sunday night,  
The hour being very late,  
When all our poor emigrants  
Met such a dreadful fate.  
The ship struck on a block of ice,  
That floated in her way,  
And very soon began to sink  
Before the break of day.

The news that has come home to us  
Is very sad indeed,  
And will cause many a mournful sigh,  
And many a heart to bleed.  
While lamentations loud and long  
To heaven will upwards go,  
From Aghnaccliffe, Esker,  
Clonee and all Killoe.

Reproduced from Killoe - history of a County Longford parish by Rev. Owen Devaney



John Doherty, Esker agent for the White Star Line at the time of the Titanic's maiden voyage



Life jacket - Cork floats covered with thick canvas

## James P. Farrell's reaction to the disaster

James P. Farrell M.P., proprietor of The Longford Leader, raised the treatment of the third class passengers both in the House of Commons and at the British enquiry into the sinking, chaired by Lord Mersey. Farrell was especially concerned about the testimony of Thomas McCormack and Bernard McCoy, both of whom were beaten back by crew members as they tried to climb into lifeboats.

At the enquiry, Lord Mersey refused to permit individual passengers to be represented, but after Farrell's intervention, he allowed a lawyer named W.D. Harbinson to act for the third class passengers as a group. C.J.P. Farrell, a brother of James P., was the solicitor instructing Harbinson.

James P. Farrell was given the opportunity to address the inquiry, and he recounted Thomas McCormack's story. However Lord Mersey ruled that he could not consider such a matter since it may have involved attempted manslaughter, and his role was to investigate the circumstances of the shipwreck.

In parliament, Farrell also questioned the President of the Board of Trade about the possibility of having the families of the lost Irish steerage passengers compensated early because many were going to the U.S. in search of work. The Board of Trade was not involved in that matter, but there were compensation funds, one of which was administered by the Lord Mayor of London. The reply to Farrell's question was that all passengers would be treated on the same basis.

