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Remembering Titanic
By *Keith Hamilton*

Southampton will stage a series of events to commemorate the tragedy Exactly 96 years ago, on April 10, 1912, the greatest passenger liner of her time gently eased away from the Southampton dockside, her decks packed with excited passengers all looking forward to the voyage ahead.



DOOMED: Titanic sets sail from Southampton on April 10, 1912. She sank five days later

Some were turning their backs on a miserable existence in the Old World and were heading for a better life, full of bright possibilities, in America.

In first class, far removed from the crowded conditions of steerage, the rich and famous were settling into their sumptuous state rooms, anticipating a transatlantic crossing in the lap of luxury.

One fact did unite every passenger, wealthy and poor alike: they were all delighted they had been lucky enough to get a berth on the maiden voyage of this floating palace named Titanic.

Sense of grief The White Star liner boasted the best of everything and her designers claimed that she was "unsinkable".

History, as everyone knows, was to prove them terribly wrong, resulting in a huge loss of life that left an enduring sense of grief echoing down the decades to modern Southampton.

Over the coming days, as in previous years, the city will remember **Titanic** in a series of special events and recall the huge death toll of passengers and crew who died after the liner struck an iceberg.

At 2.20am on April 15, 1912, after **Titanic** had snapped in two, the bow sank and the stern was briefly in an upright position before it slipped beneath the waves.

The survivors in the lifeboats later told of hearing the screams of those falling into the freezing Atlantic, but their cries for help were short-lived as they quickly froze to death, leaving the ghastly sight of corpses floating in the still sea. In total 1,502 men, women and children died.

As most of the liner's crew came from the crowded terraced streets in Southampton's dockland, the sinking had a devastating effect on the port with more than 500 households losing at least one family member.

Unfortunately one of the main commemoration events, a personal appearance by Millvina Dean, the last living survivor of **Titanic**, has been cancelled due to ill-health.

She was just nine weeks old when, together with her mother and brother, she survived the sinking.

Millvina's talk at the Turner Sims Concert Hall was sold-out but the 96-year-old has developed a chest infection, resulting in the loss of her voice.

Millvina, who lives at Woodlands, near Ashurst, said: "I'm truly sorry that I won't be able to do the talk tomorrow as I was so looking forward to it and I hope people won't be too disappointed."

It is planned that Millvina's appearance will be rescheduled.

Sunday promises to be a poignant occasion as members of the public gather for an open air service of commemoration.

Memorial service The 45-minute service at Southampton's Holy Rood Church, traditionally regarded as a memorial to merchant seamen who have lost their lives at sea, will begin at midday and include readings, hymns and a wreath-laying ceremony.

Tomorrow, an auction of **Titanic** and steamship collectables will be held at the former

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magistrates' court in the Civic Centre between 10am and 4pm, while at Southampton's Maritime Museum at Town Quay Road celebrated local storyteller, Michael O'Leary will recount **Titanic Tales** at 10am, 11am, midday and 1pm.

On Saturday the annual Southampton **Titanic** lectures will be held at the North Guild Lecture Theatre at the Civic Centre from 9.45am to 1pm.

Included in the three presentations will be a talk by Phillip Littlejohn on his grandfather, Alexander James Littlejohn, a saloon steward who survived the sinking.

For full details on Southampton **Titanic** events telephone: 023 8083 3333.

12:10pm Thursday 10th April 2008


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