Center Object on *Titanic's* Staircase Skylight Weather Covers

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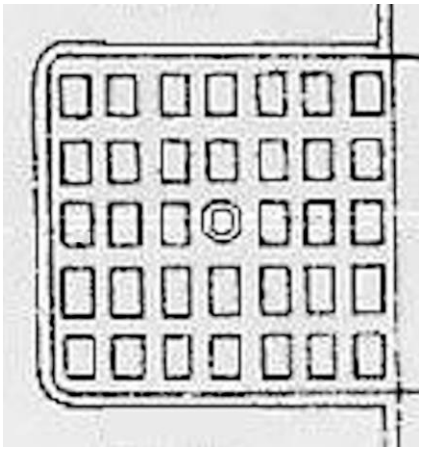
Introduction

The staircase skylight weather covers located on *Titanic's* boat deck and roof over the officers' quarters have rectangular glass panes except for the center of the weather covers. In plans and to a lesser extent photos we see what appears to be a round glass pane located in the center of the skylight. Various theories have been advanced to explain this center pane. This article will attempt to analyze available evidence to clarify what the center object is. As with many aspects of *Titanic* where information is relatively sparse, this article will use the available to evidence to develop a theory about what this center object was even if enough evidence is lacking to make a definitive identification of all aspects of the object.

Plans and Photos

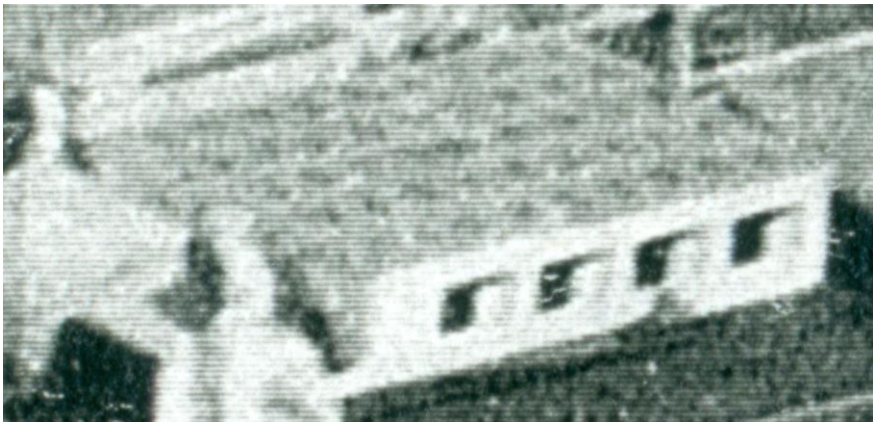
It was first noticed in plans and later in photos that the center object on *Titanic's* staircase skylight weather covers was round rather than rectangular like all the other glass panes. Figure 1 shows a part of an Olympic general arrangement plan showing the aft weather cover. An interesting aspect of this drawing is that the center object is represented by *two* concentric circles.



Aft skylight weather cover

Figure 1

Figure 2 shows *Olympic's* forward staircase skylight weather cover. It can be readily seen why it has been difficult if not impossible to discern details of the center object of the skylight.



Olympic's forward staircase skylight weather cover

Figure 2

Prevailing Theories

Because of the scarcity of the evidence, three different theories have been advanced to explain the center object.

Circular Center Glass Pane – This is probably the most widely accepted theory. This theory is that the center object is a simple round glass pane.

Light Fixture Anchor – This theory is that the center object is a circular unpainted bronze backing plate to anchor the light fixture at the top of the staircase dome.

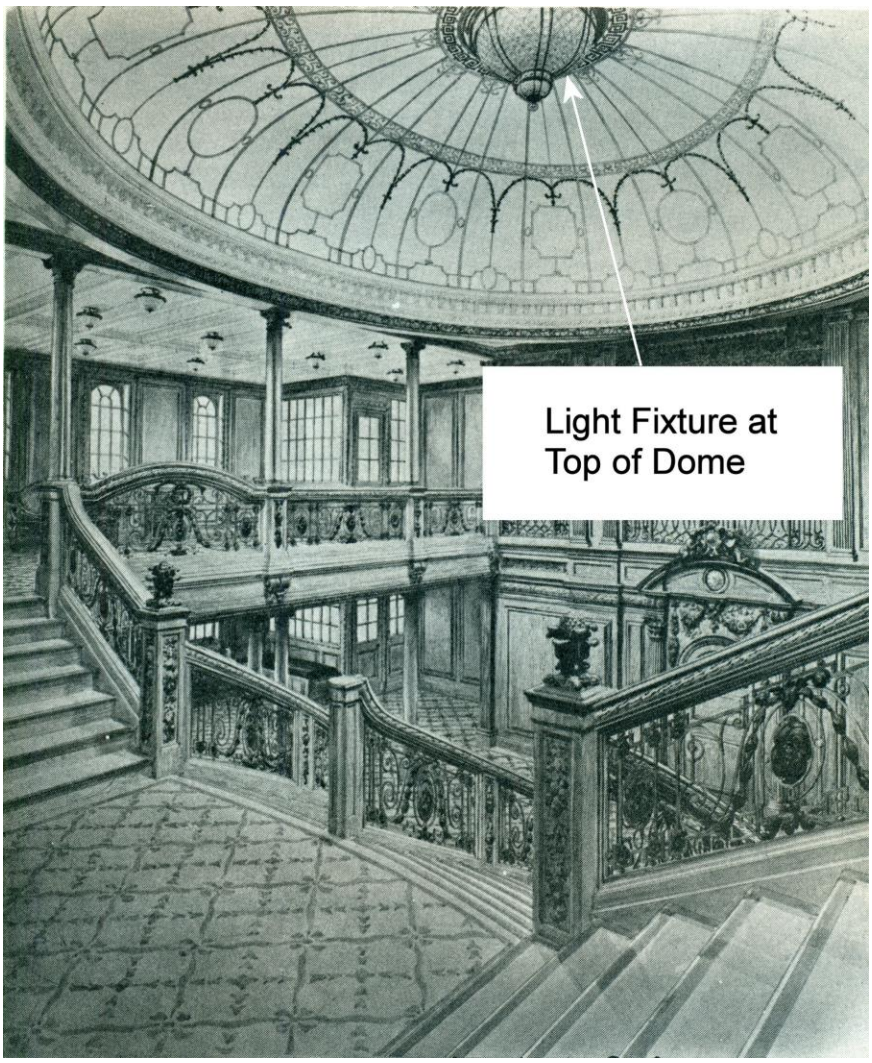
Scuttle to Service Light Bulbs in Light Fixture: This theory is that the center object is a scuttle to be able to service the bulbs in the light fixture at the top of the staircase dome.

Each of these theories has its merits. The plans and photos appear to show something round. The main question about the simple circular glass pane is why not have just another rectangular glass pane in the center? During daylight when the lamp would usually be turned off, one can see the need for light to enter directly above the light fixture for continuity of lighting. The light fixture anchor makes sense because this light fixture would be heavy and would need some kind of anchoring. However if the anchor was just a circular bronze plate then no light could enter directly above the fixture. The scuttle theory has much to recommend it but if it were just a scuttle then we have the problem with light entering directly above the light fixture. Usually when we have multiple theories about an object we usually seek to eliminate all but the

most likely theory. In this case it turns out that the answer to the identity of the center object is one that borrows aspects from all three theories and synthesizes them into a single explanation. What follows is a unified theory to explain the center object.

The Modified Scuttle Theory

The scuttle theory has much circumstantial evidence to recommend it. The most important aspect it addresses is that it provides a way to change the bulbs in the light fixture at the top of the dome. Figure 3 is a drawing showing the light fixture at the top of the dome over the first class staircase.



Light fixture at top of dome over forward staircase

Figure 3

As can be seen in Figure 3 changing the bulbs in the light fixture would be extremely difficult if attempted from the interior. Not only is the height very great but there are no structures on

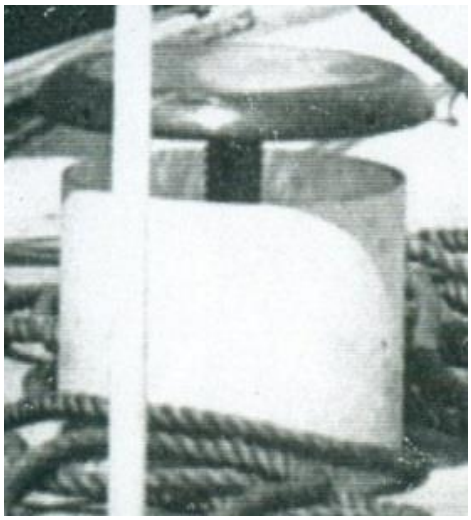
which to lean a ladder. A scaffolding would have to be erected just for the purpose of changing light bulbs. So to be able to change the bulbs from the skylight weather cover side would be much simpler and quicker.

One problem which would have to be overcome with a scuttle is that it would have to be absolutely waterproof. The simplest way to accomplish this would be to utilize the method used by mushroom vents and have a domed cover. A representative mushroom vent is shown in Figure 4. The domed cap or cover of the vent is larger than the vent pipe to direct water away from the opening.

Typical mushroom vent

Figure 4

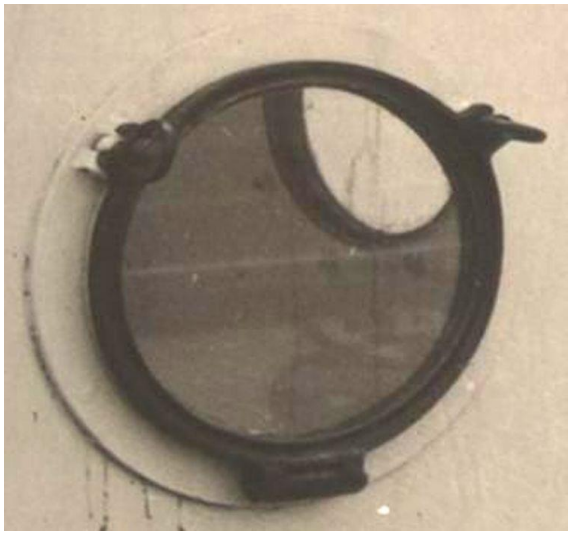
If the scuttle merely had a domed cover like a typical mushroom vent then you would have the problem of no light entering directly above the dome light fixture. To address this you could have a cover like the mushroom vents which had a glass pane in the cover like in Figure 5.



Mushroom vent with glass insert in cover

Figure 5

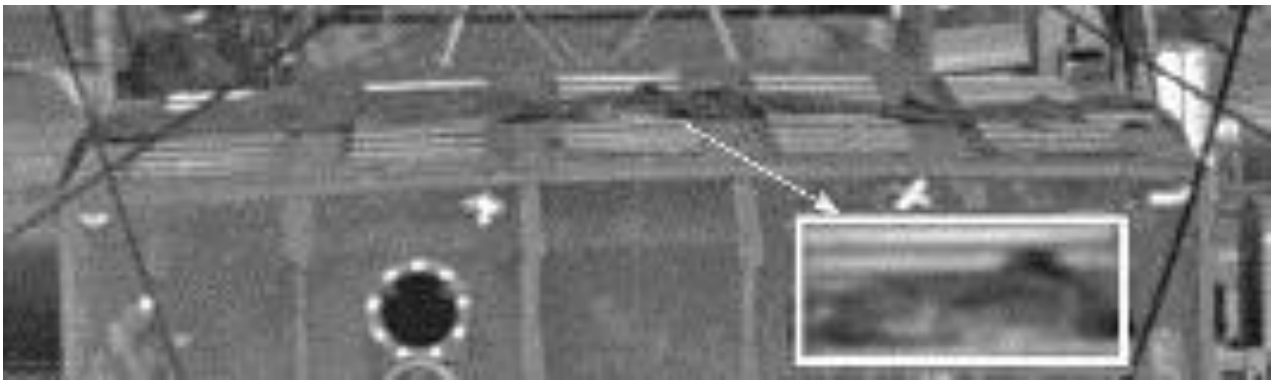
Since the scuttle cover couldn't be accessed from below then there would have to be some method for securing it. Any number of methods could be theorized but a common method in use at the time for other applications would be a hinged cover with securing "dogs" like a porthole. Figure 6 shows a hinged porthole with securing "dogs" on the side of the weather cover over the aft staircase dome on Olympic.



Hinged porthole on aft staircase weather cover

Figure 6

Having described the requirements for a center scuttle with cover we must ask whether there is any evidence which would support this theory. The evidence can be seen in Figure 7. This is *Olympic's* forward skylight weather cover during fitting out. Unfortunately there is a tarp on top of the weather cover which obscures some details on the aft side of what appears to be a domed scuttle cover. The inset is a magnification of the scuttle with cover closed.



Center scuttle with cover on weather cover over *Olympic's* forward staircase

Figure 7

Having examined the plan and photo evidence and the prevailing theories, one other aspect of this scuttle with cover having a glass insert is the type of glass. In Figure 8 we can see a photo

of a similar type of weather cover on RMS *Oceanic.* As can be seen in the photo, the glass in the rectangular panes is frosted. This gave maximum diffusion of the light for even illumination of the dome below.

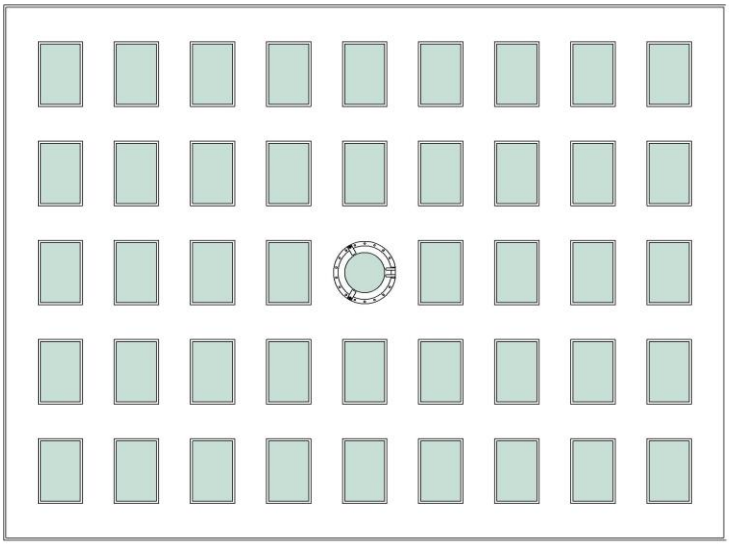
Skylight weather cover on *Oceanic*

Figure 8

The last requirement for the scuttle is that it should be able to anchor the light fixture below it. This would be accomplished by the base flange of the scuttle.

Drawings

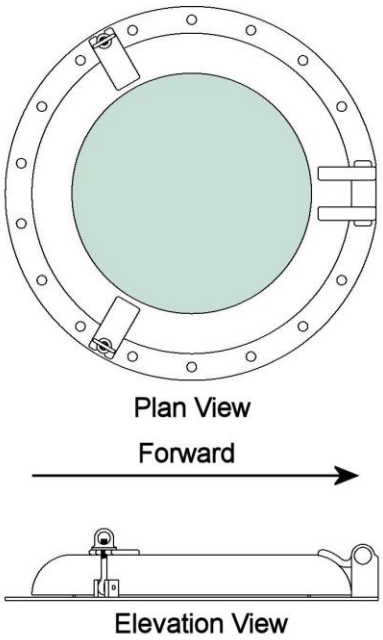
Having examined the plan and photo evidence to develop a unified theory for a scuttle on the staircase skylight weather cover drawings will illustrate the modified scuttle theory. Figure 9 shows a plan view of the forward skylight weather cover with the scuttle in the closed position.



Forward staircase skylight weather cover

Figure 9

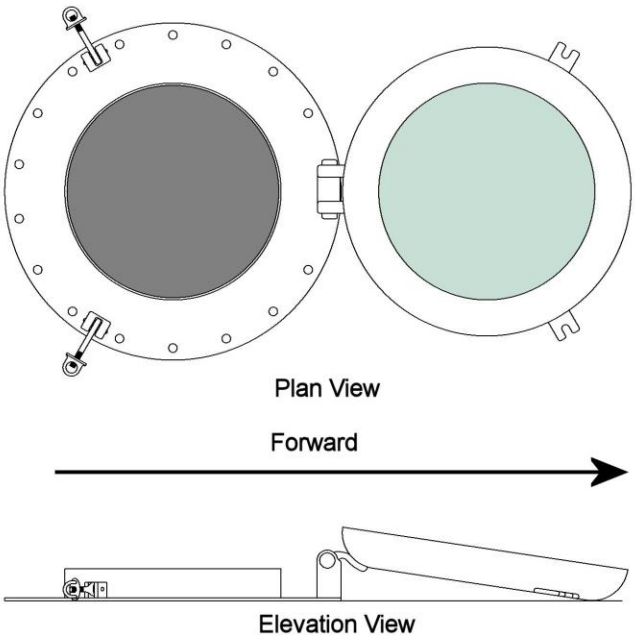
Figure 10 shows an isolated view of the scuttle with hinged cover closed.



Views of the scuttle with hinged cover closed

Figure 10

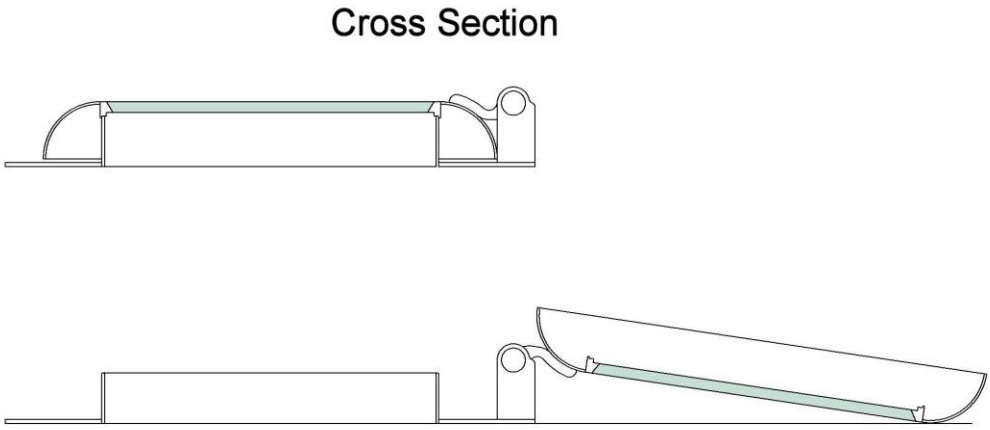
Figure 11 shows the scuttle with the cover open.



Scuttle with hinged cover open

Figure 11

Figure 12 shows a cross section of the scuttle with cover open and closed.



Cross section of the scuttle with cover closed and open

Figure 12

Conclusion

In this article available evidence has been examined to try to determine the nature of the structure at the center of the weather cover over the domes of the forward and aft first class staircases on Titanic. Evidence is largely from *Titanic's* sister ship *Olympic*. Combining existing theories about the structure, the proposed theory in this article is that this structure is a scuttle with a hinged cover having a glass insert. The hinged cover is secured with "dogs" like a porthole. The reason that the cover may not be distinct in photos is that it was painted white except for the glass insert. The purpose of the cover is to provide access to the bulbs of the dome light fixture below it.